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ABSTRACT

Over one million students are enrolled in basic college speech courses each year, providing big business for publishers and authors of speech texts and an opportunity for abuse by faculty who have authored a text or who want to curry favor with a department head who has authored a text. Most multisection basic course programs taught by graduate teaching assistants use textbooks written by the department chairperson, course director or some other significant member of the faculty. A 1980 survey by D. Ochs showed that chairpersons or course directors frequently select course textbooks without consulting faculty and that textbook selection by committees of junior faculty and graduate students is rare. Most courses require a single textbook, that textbook is often selected by a single person, and most institutions have no stated policy regarding the use of faculty authored textbooks. To counteract some of these ethical and procedural weaknesses, a textbook selection committee should: (1) represent a balance of gender, instructor rank, and philosophical orientation; (2) agree on the objectives of the course, and then on criteria for considering, evaluating and choosing textbooks; (3) ensure that most of the potentially appropriate textbooks are considered by reading reviews, looking at national surveys of textbook use, and actively searching for relevant textbooks; (4) adopt a list of textbooks with varied approaches to meeting the stated course objectives, from which instructors can choose the text for their own section. (Seven references are included.) (JG)

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TEXTBOOK SELECTION CRITERIA FOR A MULTI-SECTION BASIC COURSE
TAUGHT EXCLUSIVELY BY GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS

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Some educators and scholars are eloquently adamant about the use of textbooks in college courses. Robert Connors (1986), for example, reminds us that "Texts can be powerful servants, but only our own pride in and knowledge of our subject will keep them from turning on us and becoming, as they have in the past, oppressive masters" (p. 192). While we have never personally encountered professors who have had a textbook "turn on them" and become an "oppressive master," we have seen enough horror movies on late night television to imagine the potential for a wonderful movie starring a modern day Mr. Chips, which could premier on college campuses across the country around Halloween.

While we would enjoy pursuing this possibility, we are compelled to return to the question, what are the criteria for selecting textbooks for the basic course? The answer is relatively simple in many departments. First, does the chairperson have a basic course textbook which has a relatively recent publication date and which reasonably meets the goals and needs of the program? If so, and especially if the basic course director is not tenured, the decision is relatively easy. Use that text! If the chairperson does not have a suitable text in print, does the basic course director have a basic course textbook which has a relatively recent publication date and which reasonably meets the goals and needs of the program? If so, and especially if the basic course director is tenured, the decision is very easy. Use that text! As we will suggest later in this paper, this is the

"selection criteria for a multi-section course taught exclusively by graduate teaching assistants" in too many institutions.

While we will not treat this subject with the reverence accorded it from some scholars nor the apparent pragmatic realism of some authors, we do realize that the selection of a textbook can have a major impact on the potential success of instruction. As Miller and Wiethoff (1980) point out, "textbooks are indispensable teaching aids in most courses" (p. 85). Ochs (1980) reminds us that we share, as teachers, the professional responsibility to provide the most appropriate course materials for our students. Authors outside our discipline have been even more adamant about the importance of textbooks to the eventual outcome of instruction. Griffin (1984) claims, for example, that with the possible exception of the instructor, "the textbook is the single most important variable which determines a college student's success in a content area classroom" (p. 1). We also realize that, in addition to the educational implications of textbook selection, there are other issues which ought to be involved in our discussion of these decision making processes.

The publishing and marketing of textbooks for the basic course is "big business," especially in the minds of the average, moderately paid professor. Major publishing companies estimated that there were approximately one million students enrolled in college speech courses in 1980 (Ochs). That total, according to surveys by Trank and Becker (1986), is probably conservative. The Speech Communication Association has over 2,000 post-secondary institutions on its mailing list used for the 1984 basic course survey (Gibson). While that survey did not report

total enrollment, the 1986 Trank and Becker survey, which used a representative sample of the same institutions, reported a mean basic course enrollment of nearly 900 students each year (p.17).

A liberal interpretation of this data yields a potential total of 1.8 million students in the basic course each year. At an average cost of \$15 for textbooks, we have a potential for \$27,000,000 in textbook sales for the basic speech course. Even considerably more conservative estimates of enrollment and factors such as used textbooks and instructor prepared materials do not diminish the fact that textbooks for the basic course provide a potentially big business for publishers and authors.

The second issue we want to consider before looking more closely at how textbooks are selected concerns ethical options in that selection process. Specifically, we want to reexamine the questions raised by Miller and Wiethoff (1980) and Ochs (1980) regarding the standards which ought to apply to guide the selection of a textbook for a required course, especially when the person(s) making the choice is an author whose textbook may well be adopted.

Miller and Wiethoff (1980) categorize the potential positions in response to this question into four groups. The hard-core ethical purists maintain that faculty should not profit financially from selling instructional materials to students in a required course when they make decisions or hold power over those who make the decisions regarding which materials will be required in the course. Ochs (1980), who clearly fits into this group, argues that no faculty should permit the adoption of their textbook under these circumstances unless the profits are returned

directly to the students who are required to enroll in the course and required to purchase the materials. A second group, the quasi-purists, agree but would allow the profits to go to the university foundation or a departmental fund. This would also allow for a clearer method of allowing tax deductions to the author.

Ethical proceduralists, a third group, see nothing wrong with using their text in such a manner if it is selected by someone else. They go to extremes to ensure that the textbook committee is impartial, that it examines every possible appropriate text, and that the decision is seen as being made by someone other than them. While this is an admirable approach, it is difficult to determine exactly how much authority or control the authors hold over groups of subordinate faculty and teaching assistants they may have appointed to the committee. The final group, pragmatic realists, appear at the other end of the ethical continuum, and argue that authors ought to avoid appearing as unethical. Miller and Wiethoff contend that this position is perhaps frequently used as philosophical justification for a questionable ethical practice (p. 86).

Regardless of your ethical persuasion, it is difficult to deny that potential for abuse exists. The magnitude of this potential is clearly the most significant in institutions which have large numbers of students in multi-sectioned basic courses. The two of us, for example, teach in an institution where 6,000 students are required to take the basic course each year. If we required a textbook which paid each of us a dollar royalty and a workbook which paid each of us fifty cents royalty, we could each

receive an additional \$9,000--not an insignificant amount given our current lifestyles. When we look at how textbooks are selected in the next section, the relevance of these issues of ethics will become more apparent.

What do we know about how textbooks are selected for the multi-section basic course taught exclusively by graduate teaching assistants? This issue has been discussed frequently at basic course conferences over the past several years and most of us are familiar with the basic procedures. Our initial inference that the departmental chairperson's or the basic course director's textbooks are used without regard to other available textbooks is not totally false. In fact, it would be difficult to find a large basic course program which did not use textbooks written by the chairperson, course director, or some other significant member of the faculty.

In addition to what we know from such conferences and interactions with colleagues from a wide range of institutions, a 1980 survey provides more specific details concerning the selection of textbooks for the basic course (Ochs). In over a third of the institutions surveyed, the chairperson or program director selected the textbook for the course without the advice or help of the faculty. Another third used a committee of the faculty or the entire faculty to select the text. Eleven percent used the senior faculty to make the selection. Nine percent used a committee of junior faculty or graduate students to make the selection and nine percent allowed all instructors to select textbooks for their respective sections.

Ochs also discovered that in nearly half the institutions, the instructors did not have a choice about which text to use-- there was only one available. About twenty percent of the respondents indicated that a limited number of choices were available and about thirty percent indicated that instructors could select any textbook for their class (p. 299). Only seven percent responded that faculty authors could not profit from the selection of required textbooks in required courses. Ochs' three conclusions reinforce our general impression of textbook selection procedures at large institutions with a multi-section basic course: most courses require a single textbook, that textbook is selected by a single person in a large number of cases, and most institutions have no stated policy regarding the use of faculty authored textbooks (pp. 299-300).

As far as we can discover, few individuals or committees use specific criteria such as readability or develop reviews as extensive as those many of us prepare for publishers in their textbook selection process. There are other variables we are unable to explain in the process: for example, what effect does the fact that the author of a particular text was a former advisor or professor have in selecting a text? What weight does having the course director's name in the acknowledgements or on a brochure carry in the decision? What impact does the textbook representative have on the decision making process? The fact that there are dozens of textbooks in our discipline with very few internal differences, but which remain moderately successful, indicates that there are a wide variety of reasons for individual adoption procedures.

While we are able to develop generalizations about how textbooks are selected, we have been less successful in suggesting why particular choices are made--at least beyond the personal profit motive and other ethical issues discussed earlier. In this final section, we offer a few guidelines which ought to guide the selection of textbooks for the multi-section basic course. The suggestions are certainly not exhaustive but demonstrate a process of activity which needs to be considered in adopting the best available material for the basic course. We would add that these suggestions are not revolutionary, although following them would evidently require a change in practice for nearly half the institutions requiring a basic course.

The initial step in this process is the selection of a committee to be involved in the entire process of adopting appropriate textbooks for the course. It ought to include the range of diversity within any particular program with a balance of gender, faculty ranks, and philosophical orientation. If graduate teaching assistants are teaching the course, they ought to be appropriately represented on the committee. In our own department, for example, graduate students comprise sixty percent of the committee. Membership on the committee ought be determined by a joint effort of the faculty and the graduate students' representative organization.

Once that committee is organized, the members need to agree on the articulated goals and objectives for the basic course. Hopefully, this is not a process of generating those items, but of discussing and agreeing on the meaning and application of previously articulated statements regarding the role, content, and

function of the basic course in the larger curriculum and institution. If this is not done effectively, the committee will be unable to agree on criteria by which textbooks will be considered, evaluated, or eventually chosen. Establishing that criteria is the third, and perhaps the most important, element in establishing an efficient process for arriving at decisions.

Before the committee begins looking at potential textbooks, they need to agree on the essential elements any text must provide to be seriously considered. These criteria obviously ought to develop out of the goals and objectives for the course. If, for example, this is a performance course with an emphasis on argumentative discourse, any textbook selected must address the content areas relevant to that course outcome in a significant manner. Simply making this sort of decision will eliminate dozens of textbooks from consideration. If a text is to be a meaningful instructional supplement, it must address the content and the focus established for the course. The committee should also decide what sorts of additional teaching aids the adoption of any text should provide. In a program with a large number of teaching assistants and a relatively large turnover of instructors, a first-rate instructor's guide may be a requirement. Several publishers are currently providing videotapes of student speeches, course guides, and other instructional materials with the adoption of particular textbooks. The committee needs to decide which of these supplemental materials are essential and which are desirable for adoption before they actually begin reviewing materials. The committee may also want to consider other criteria including cost, professional quality, sequence of chapters,

adaptability, or pluralistic issues before beginning the process of reviewing textbooks.

By agreeing on the goals and objectives for the course and the criteria by which selections will be made, the committee has made the remainder of their task considerably easier. At this point, the committee needs to begin reviewing appropriate materials. In addition to the sometimes magical appearance of new and revised textbooks through the mail, there are additional ways to ensure that at least most of the potentially appropriate textbooks are considered. Instead of telling all textbook representatives to send whatever they have in the basic speech communication area, show them the goals and objectives and the criteria by which the committee will make its decision. They know the market and they know their books. They will be able to save themselves and the committee a considerable amount of time and effort and expense. The members of the committee should review the brochures which publishers send and have the committee visit the publishers' presentations at conventions and conferences. Read the reviews in COMMUNICATION EDUCATION and other professional journals. Look at national surveys to discover which textbooks are being used at other institutions. To be fair and effective in discovering the most appropriate materials, the committee must actively search for relevant textbooks.

There are very few truly unique textbooks available, regardless of the focus and nature of the department's basic course, and we advocate adopting a list of textbooks which provide a variety of approaches to meeting the stated goals and objectives of the course. This will permit the committee to avoid the

impossible task of agreeing on the single best textbook and will allow the course instructors the opportunity to chose a text which most effectively complements their background, experience, and approach to teaching.

Adopting a variety of textbooks which support the focus of the basic course does not necessarily contribute to increased deviation between sections. The potential advantages, from our perception, clearly outweigh any problems which might be created. In addition, the adoption of a number of textbooks which meet the instructional needs of a variety of instructors in the multi-sectioned basic course allows the director or chairperson, who might be an author of one of those texts, to further avoid a potentially embarrassing and unethical position. The selection of a number of textbooks also provides your basic course with a wider variety of supplemental material such as videotapes, slides, and instructor's guides from a number of publishers.

Once the committee has made their decisions, they need to prepare an annotated list of the textbooks including strengths and weaknesses and supplemental materials. This list can then be sent to graduate students accepted and appointed in the spring so they can select the text they wish to use next fall. It can also be used by graduate instructors who are currently teaching and who will be returning for the next academic year. Even if the faculty should decide that all new instructors should use the same text for the first semester they teach your course, all returning graduate instructors ought to be allowed to chose from a list of appropriate textbooks.

After the instructors have chosen their textbooks for the

next term, the course director or appointed representative will need to place an order with the campus and/or local bookstore. While we have criticized some authors for questionable practices when it comes to adopting a textbook for the basic course, we want to conclude with a suggestion which will benefit all textbook authors. We have all heard stories from textbook representatives and publishers about schools which order several hundred copies of a new text and have that entire order filled with complimentary copies which were sent to professors across the country. According to last month's CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION, the sale of complimentary copies of textbooks amounted to \$80-million in 1986 (October 14, 1987, p. B1). If we are ordering a new text or a new edition, we have helped curb this clearly unethical behavior by instructing the bookstore to order directly from the publisher. While we were met with mild protests, the bookstore complied. The textbook representatives are more than willing to let you know whether your bookstore has followed your instructions.

Selecting appropriate textbooks for a multi-section course taught exclusively by graduate teaching assistants is a significant activity which ought to be taken seriously by the faculty. It is an activity which has the potential for conflicting ethical and procedural demands which ought to be resolved prior to the actual selection process. We believe it is an activity which ought to involve representatives from all major groups of individuals who teach the course and one which should result in decisions which allow those individuals the greatest opportunities for success in the classroom.

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